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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 000616

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DEPARTMENT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ BLASTS PRO-CHAVEZ PARTIES FOR NOT DISSOLVING

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CARACAS 00000616 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. During a March 18 television broadcast, President Chavez strongly criticized and questioned the political loyalty of three prominent pro-Chavez parties, Podemos, Patria Para Todos, and the Communist Party. He urged them to either dissolve and merge into his proposed United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) or join the opposition. All three parties are going to considerable, even humiliating, lengths to reassert their allegiance to Chavez. Key Podemos leaders, including the governor of Yaracuy and the mayor of Maracaibo, have left the party and pledged to join the PSUV. The opposition is quietly letting this intra-Chavismo dispute escalate on its own. While Chavez frequently justifies the formation of the PSUV in terms of promoting greater party democracy, the process so far has only highlighted Chavez' own authoritarianism. End Summary.

Chavez: "Those That Want To Go, Should Go"

¶2. (SBU) During his March 18 television broadcast of "Alo, Presidente," President Chavez lambasted pro-Chavez parties that have not yet dissolved as a first step in the formation of Chavez' proposed United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). While reiterating their allegiance to Chavez, the leaders of Podemos, Patria Para Todos (PPT) and the Communist Party (PCV) have all registered their desire to negotiate the terms of their entry into a future PSUV before actually dissolving (Reftel). Chavez is not leaving them any negotiating room. Noting that he does not consider any of the three parties "indispensable," Chavez instead invited all three parties to leave the ranks of his government "quietly" or "hugging like old comrades," but not by "throwing stones." He added that he considered Podemos, the most vocal pro-Chavez party holdout, to be "almost the opposition" already.

¶3. (SBU) Chavez also singled out certain small-party leaders for sharp criticism. He accused Aragua Governor Didalco Bolivar of Podemos of being a "social democrat," not a "socialist," and commented that Governor Bolivar appears more "aggressive" in confronting Chavez' single revolutionary party proposal than he was in defending Chavez' government during the short-lived April 2002 coup. He similarly

chastised the speeches of Podemos Secretary General Ismael Garcia. In addition, the Venezuelan President excoriated Communist Party President Jeronimo Carrera for suggesting that the informal Caracas street vendors that the government has been trying to displace from downtown streets represent a "lumpenproletariat."

¶4. (SBU) Looking ahead, Chavez expressed confidence in his hand-picked, Fifth Republic Movement (MVR)-dominated committee overseeing the development of the PSUV, and stated explicitly that he does not intend to negotiate quotas of government and party positions with any of the pro-Chavez parties. He also reiterated his intention to swear in over 2000 grassroots PSUV party promoters on March 24 and stressed the need for supporters to be "ready to give their lives to propel the socialist revolution in Venezuela." Chavez will also hold a bigger outdoor rally for party promoters on April 19, a national holiday celebrating Venezuela's declaration of independence. While Chavez and his closest supporters are not openly endorsing any of the recall referenda against pro-Chavez governors, the government-dominated National Electoral Council has allowed formal recall petition drives to be opened against Podemos governor Didalco Bolivar in Aragua State. (Note: Podemos and PPT won two governorships each of 23 states). One petroleum analyst told petroleum attache that PPT members have lost jobs over the past few months. (Note: PPT is well represented within PDVSA, stemming from the time PPT members Ali Rodriguez, now BRV Ambassador to Cuba, and Bernardo Alvarez, the BRV's Ambassador in Washington, dominated PDVSA).

Crawling Back to Chavez

¶5. (SBU) In the wake of President Chavez' strongest condemnation of Podemos, PPT and the PCV to date, all three

CARACAS 00000616 002.2 OF 003

parties are confronting internal crises, including the defection of key party members. Several Podemos leaders bolted from the party March 20 and 21 to join ranks with the PSUV-to-be, including Yaracuy Governor Carlos Gimenez, Maracaibo Mayor Gian Carlo Di Martino and eight other Podemos mayors, and three regional secretaries of the party. The regional secretary of Vargas announced that the state Podemos chapter leadership unanimously voted to dissolve and join the PSUV. Five of Podemos' 18 members of the National Assembly group have now also left the party. Yaracuy Governor Gimenez told the media that he stands ready to be "another soldier ready to strengthen the country, now that we have our dream leader." Mayor Di Martino, who has previously passed through the ranks of opposition parties Un Nuevo Tiempo and La Causa R, issued a press release calling for "cohesion" in support of the "indisputable leader of the revolutionary process."

¶6. (SBU) During a March 19 press conference, PPT Secretary General Jose Albornoz declined to respond to Chavez' criticism, comparing the formation of the PSUV to a family dispute. In a comment remarkable for its self-abasement, Albornoz puled "If the father says something, the children do not talk back, as the father knows if he is right or not." He also stressed the PPT's "absolute support for the revolutionary process" and endorsed the elimination of term limits for the presidency and other elected positions. PCV Secretary General Oscar Figuera also ducked Chavez'

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criticism, telling a separate March 19 press conference that whether the PCV dissolves or not, the PCV would "contribute to the unity of anti-imperialist forces." Podemos Secretary General Ismael Garcia has backtracked publicly from his criticism of the PSUV party formation process. He told opposition newspaper "Tal Cual" in an interview published March 19 that his slogan "My country, democratic socialism, and life" is really the same as Chavez' slogan "My country,

socialism, or death."

Opposition Quietly Snickering

17. (C) While opposition parties are relishing the biggest public dispute among pro-Chavez parties in months, they are also not yet reaching out to the three pro-Chavez party holdouts. Un Nuevo Tiempo party president Omar Barboza told PolCouns March 20 that it is still not clear that Podemos, PPT, or PCV are really going to continue resisting joining Chavez' proposed PSUV. Moreover, Barboza said any opposition expressions of political support for the three parties would only undermine those parties and buttress Chavez' hard-line and intolerant position within pro-government circles. Pompeyo Marquez, a one-time PCV Party Chairman and currently an opposition activist, told poloff that he expects the PCV to splinter into two groups, one that joins the PSUV unconditionally, and another that sticks to communism. Other opposition politicians expect similar splits to take place in Podemos and PPT, leaving both small pro-Chavez parties, even smaller still.

Comment

18. (C) Chavez has consistently dressed up his push to form a single "revolutionary" party as an effort to create a more cohesive and democratic political base. But by personally turning up the pressure on three small, but important, pro-Chavez parties, he is very publicly demonstrating his intolerance of political pluralism and preference for authoritarianism. Until now, he has let some of his most loyal supporters rail against the holdouts, but now he is leading the charge. Prior to his March 18 televised tongue-lashing of the holdouts, Chavez said that pro-Chavez parties could take their time deciding whether or not to join the PSUV. He also warned that he would treat those that do not join the PSUV "out of government," a form of political purgatory. Now he is saying they will be considered part of the opposition, a fate much worse than purgatory under a government that routinely harasses and presses politically-motivated cases against opposition leaders.

19. (C) Regarding prospects for complete mergers with the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, most local analysts believe PPT is the most likely candidate to dissolve and the Communist Party the least likely candidate. If PPT, Podemos, and the Communist Party continue to resist merging into the PSUV for much longer, they are likely to hemorrhage

CARACAS 00000616 003.2 OF 003

additional opportunistic and intimidated members. All three would bring value to the PSUV table because they each maintain, by Venezuelan standards, well developed party organizations. Chavez' MVR, in contrast, was largely an electoral machine for Chavez, and not a traditional political party. Interestingly, Chavez' March 24 swearing in of PSUV promoters was originally supposed to be a much bigger event. The April 19 follow-on ceremony has reportedly been scheduled to take into account ongoing delays in getting the PSUV off the ground. Chavez' ham-handed treatment of the PPT, Podemos, and the Communist party appears to be contributing to the PSUV's slow organizational start.

WHITAKER